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Rusty

[image]

A half-moon glowed on Smoth Granite boulders,Turing them Sliver. The silence wad broken only by a ripple of water from the swift black river and the Whisper of trees in the Forest beyond. There was a stirring in the shadows,and From all around lithe dark shapes crept stealthily overs the rocks .Unsheathed claws glinted in the Moonlight. Wary eyes flased like amber.
And then,as if on a silent signal,the creatures leaped at wach other, and suddenly the rocks
were alive with wrestling, screeching cats.

At least the center of the Frenzy of fur and claws, A massive Dark tabby pinned a bracken-colored Tom to the Ground and drew up his Head triumphantly. Oakheart! The Tabby Growled. How dare you Hunt in Our Territory! The Sunning Rocks Belong to Thunder clan! After tonight Tiger claw, this will be just Another River clan Hunting Ground! The bracken-Colored Tom Spat Back.

A warning Yowl Came Out from the shores, sliding out of the water below The Rocks. The drenched river clan Warriors bounded silenty up the Shore and hurled themselves into battle without even Stopping to shake the water from the fur. The dark tabby glared down at Oakheart. You May Swims like otters,but you and your warriors don't belong in this forest! He drew back his lips and Showed his teeth as the cat struggled beneath him.
The desperate scream of a thunder clan she-cat rose above the clamor. A wiry Riverclan tom Had pinned the brown Warrior flat on Her Belly. Now he Lunged towards Her Neck with mighty Leap,he knocked the Ememy warrior away fron the she-cat. Quick, Mousefur Run! He Ordered before Turning on the River Clan tom Who had threatened her. Mousefur scrambled to her paws, wincing from a deep gash on her shoulder,and raced away.

Behind her, Tigerclaw spat eith rage as the river clan tom sliced Open His Nose. Open his nose his nose. blood blinded him For

instant, but he lunged forwared regaredless And Sank his teeth into the Hind Leg of his Ememy.

The riverclan cat squealed and struggled free. Tigerclaw! The yowl came from a warrior came from a warrior with a tail as red a fox fur
This is useless! There is To many Riverclans
Warriors

No redtail. Thunderclan Will Never Be Beaten! Tigerclaw Yowled back leaping to Redtail side.This is our Territory! Blood was welling around broad black Muzzled, and he shook his head impatiently scattering scarlet drops onto the rocks. Thunder will Honor your Courage,Tigerclaw but we cannot affored to lose anymore warrior's. Redtail urged bluestar Would never expect her Warrior to fight
Against these Impossible odds. We will have Another chance to avenge this Defeat.

He met Tigerclaw anber-eyed gaze steadily then reared away and Spranged onto a boulder at the Egde of the tree Retreat!" Redtail Yowled. At once his warriors Struggled they Backed Toward redtail for a heatbeat, the river clan cats looked Confused. Was this battle so Easily won? Then Oakheart yowled a Jubilant cry. As soon as they heared him, then oakheart yowled a jubilant cry. As soon they heared him,the Thunderclan Cats dived down the dar side of the sunningrocks, then disappeared into the forest and Glanced back at the bloodstained battlefield. His face was grim,his eyes furious slits. Then he leaped after his Clan into the silent forest

In a desereted clearing, an old gray she-cat sat alone, staring up at the clear night sky. All around her in the shadows

Bluestar Looked Up Amonged The Stars
Spottedleaf Next to Her
Bluestar: How is Mousefur
Spottedleaf: her wounds are deep bluestar
Aswered the tortoise-shell settling herself on the night cool grass.
Spottedleaf: but she is young and strong she will Heal Quickly.
Bluestar: and the others?
Spottedleaf: they will all recover too

Bluestar Sighed. We are Lucky not to lost any of our Warriors this time. You are a gifted medince cat spottedleaf.
She tilted her Head agian and look at the stars and studied the stars
Bluestar: i am deeply troubled by tonight defeat.Thunder clan has not been beaten in beaten in it own Territory snice i have become leader. She murmured

These are difficult times for our. The season of newleaf is late. thunderclan needs more warriors if it is to survive.
But the year is only Beginning,Spottedleaf pointed out clamly there will be more kits when greenleaf comes. The grey cat twitched her broad shoulders. Perhaps. But training our young to become warrior takes of time. If thunder clan is to defend it territory, it must have new warriorsbas soon as possible
Are you asking starclan for answers? Moewed Spottedleaf gently following bluestars gaze and starings up at the swath of stars glittering in the dark sky.
It is at times like this we needs words of ancient warriors to help us.
Has starclan spoken to you bluestar asked bluestar Ask Clamly. Not for some moon bluestar said spottedleaf
Suddenly a shooting star blazed over the treetops.

Spottedleaf tail twitched and fut along her spine bristled. Bluestar ears pricked but she remained silent as spottedleaf continued to gaze upward.
After a few moments Spottedleaf lowered her head and turned her head to bluestar. it was a messge from Star clan she murmured. a distant look came into her eyes. Fire alone will save our Clan
Fire? Bluestar echoed. " but fire is feared by all the clans how can it save us?
Spottedleaf shook her head i don't know she admitted.but this is the message starclan has chosen to share with Me"
The thunderclan leader fixed her clear blue eyes on the medicine cat. "You have never been wrong before, Spottedleaf" she moewed. If star clan had spoken then it must be so. Fire Will save our clan."

Rusty Was Sitting On the fence Looking at the Forest He deciede to go in the forest and Hunt A mouse so He Jump off The Fence And walk To look for a Mouse He found A Mouse and Try To catch But Failed.

He Woke Up In the twoleg Nest In he bed He Twoleg Come up and Gave Up Him Feed but Rusty Refuse To eat it So He Decided to Go in the forest. He Jump Up on the Fence and Went to The Forest Walking And Looking for prey grey paw Run Up to Him and attack him.

He Run But Decide To Fight Back After Awell
???: what Are you Doing in kittypet
Rusty: why Would Ask and what Your Name?
Greypaw: The Name Greypaw and Im From thunderclan
Rusty:What Thunderclan?
Greypaw: oh I forgot your A kittypet Greypaw Teased
Greypaw:Well The Four Clan As you Know Im from Thunder Clan There riverclan and windclan,Shadowclan Also There Stars Up there.
Rusty looked Up at the Stars
Greypaw:That Starclan Where good cats go
A Bushed Rattled
GreyPaw scented Bluestar and loinheart

GreyPaw: You should Really Really Go Back
Before Rusty Could go back Greypaw heard loinheart and bluestar coming out

Rusty Meets Wild cats

[image][image]

Rusty prepard to spring into the brushes not knowing which way is safe to pounce.
He was Too late. A voice moewed behind him, firm and menacing "what going on here?"
Rusty turned to see a large gray she-cat scrolling majestically out from the undergrowth. She was magnificent.
White hairs streakeds, her muzzle,and an ugly scar parted the fur arcoss her shoulders,but her smooth gray coat shine like sliver in the the moonlight. Bluestar beside rusty,Graypaw crouched down and narrowed his eyes. He crouched down even lower when a second cat-
A handsome,golden tabby-followed the gray cat into the clearing.

You shouldn't be so near the TwolegPlaces Graypaw!" Growled the golden tabby angrily,narrowing his green eyes.
I know loinheart, im sorry." Graypaw looked down at his paws.
Rusty copied Graypaw and crouched low to the forest Grass, his ears twitching nervously. The cats had an air of Strength he had never seen in any of his garden
Friends, Maybe what Smudge had warned him was ture.
"Who is this?" Asked bluestar
Rusty flinched as she turned her gaze on him. Her piercing blue eyes made him feel even more vulnerable. "He no threat," mewed grayed paw "he not another clan warriror, just a kittypet from beyond our territories."

Just a kittypet!" The word inflamed rusty, but he held his tongue. The warning look in bluestar's stare told him that she had observed the anger in his eyes,and he looked away. This is Bluestar,she leader of my clan!" Graypaw hissed to rusty under his breath. "And loinheart he my mentor, which means he's training me to be a warrior." Thank you for the introduction Graypaw," moewed loinheart coolly.
Bluestar was still staring at rusty."you fight well for a kittypet she

moewed rusty and graypaw exchanged confused glances. How could she know? We have been watching you both," bluestar went, as if she had read their thoughts. "We woundered how you deal with an intruder, graypaw looked pleased at bluestar praise."sit up now,both of you!" Bluestar looked at rusty." You too, kittypet," he sat up immediately and held bluestar's gaze evenly as she addressed him. You reacted well to the attack, kittypet. Graypaw is stronger than you, but you used your wits to defend yourself.And you turned to face him when he chased you. I've not seen a kittypet do that before rusty manged to nod his thanks, a back by such unexpected prasie. Her next words surprised him even more. " i have been woudering how you would perform out here, beyond the Twolegplace.We patrol this border frequently,so I have often seen you sitting on your boundary, staring out into the forest. And now, at last, you have dared to place your paws here." Bluestar stared at Rusty Thoughtfully. You do seem to have A natural hunting ability, sharps eyes you would have caught the that mouse if You had not hesitated so long."R-really?" Rusty stammered.

Loinheart spoke now. His deep moew was respectful but insisted. "Bluestar,this is a kittypet. He shouldn't be hunting in thunder clan territory. Send him home to his Twolegs!"
Rusty prickled at loinheart dismissive words. "Send me home?" He moewed impatiently. Bluestar's words had made him glow with pride. She had noticed him; she had been impressed by him. "But I've only come here to hunt for a mouse or two I'm sure there's enough to go around." Bluestar had her head to acknowledge loinheart's words now her blue eyes were blazing with anger. "There never enough to go around,she spat. "If you didn't such a soft, overfed life, you would know that!"
Rusty was confused by the Sudden Rage,but one glance at the horrified look on Graypaw's face enough to tell him he had spoken to freely. Loinheart stepped to his leader's side. Both warriors loomed over him now. Rusty looked into bluestar's threating stare and his pride dissolved. These were not cozy fireside cats he was dealing with-they were mean, mean, hungry cata who were probably going to finish what Growing had started.
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Chapter 2 rusty

[image]

"Well?" Hissed bluestar,her face only a mouse-legnth from his now loinleart remained silent as he towered over Rusty.
He flattened his ear and croched under the golden warrior cold stares. His fur prickeld uncomfortably. I am no threat to your clan rusty moewed looking at his trembling paws.

You threathen our clan when You Take our Food," yowled bluestar." You have plenty of food in your twoleg nest already. You come here to Hunt for Sport. But we hunt to survive." The truth of the warrior queen's word pierced Rusty like a blacktorn,and suddenly he understood her anger. He stopped trembling and sat up,and straightend his ears. He raised his eyes to meet hers. I hadn't thought of it that wat before. I am sorry he moewed solemnly. I will not hunt here again bluestar's let her hackles fall and signaled to lionheart to step back.

You are an unsual kittypet. Rusty she moewed.
Graypaw sigh of relief made rusty ear twitch. He heard the approval in bluestar vocie and noticed as she swapped a meaningful glance with loinheart. The look made him curious. What flased between the two warrior? Ouietly he Asked is Survival here really so hard. Our territory covers only part of the forest, answered bluestar." " we compete with other clans for what we have.And this year late newleaf means prey is scarce."
Is your clan very big?" He moewed his eyes wide. Big enough replied bluestar. "Our territory can support us but there is no prey left over. Are you all warrior then? Rusty mewed. Bluestar guarded answers were just making him more and more curious. Loinheart awswered him. "Some are warriors. Some are too young or too old or too busy caring for kits to hunt. And you all live and share prey together rusty murmured in awe, thinking a little guilty of own easy, selfish life. Bluestar looked again at lionleart. The golden tabby stared back at her steadily. At last she returned her gaze to rusty and moewed." Perhaps you should find out these things for

yourself. Would you like to join thunderclan?" Rusty was so surprised, he couldn't speak. Bluestar went on: if you did you would train with Graypaw to become a Clan warrior."
But Kittypets cant be warriors! Graypaw blurted out. They Don't have Warrior Blood! A sad look clouded bluestar eyes. " warriors blood," she echoed with a sigh. "Too much of that has been spilled lately."
Bluestar fell silent And silent and lionheart moewed, "bluestar is Only offering you training, young kit . There is no garadantee you would become a full warrior.

Chapter 2 bluestar

[image]

It might prove too be difficult for you.After all,you used to a comfortable life."
Rusty was stung by loinheart words. He turn his head to the golden tabby. Why offer me a chance then?"
"You are right to question our motives,The fact is, Thunderclan needs more Warriors." Understand that bluestar doesn't make this offer lightly," warned Loinheart. "If you wish to train with us,we will have to take you into the clan. You must either live with us and respect our ways,or return to your twoleg place and never comeback. You cant live with a paw in both worlds." A cool breeze stirred the undergrowth, ruffling Rusty's fur. He shivered,not with a cold, but excitement at the incredible possibilities opening up in front of him. "Are you wondering if it's worth giving up your Comfortable kittypet life? Asked bluestar clamly. But do you realize the price you will pay the for your warmth and food?"
Rusty looked at her, puzzled. Surely his encounter with these cat had to him just how easy and luxurious his life was. "I can tell you are still a tom," bluestar added, "despite the twoleg stench that cling to your fur."
"What do you mean-still a tom?"
"You haven't yet been taken by the twoleg to see the cuter?" Moewed bluestar gravelg. "You would be very different then. Not quite so keen to fight a clan cat, I suspect!" Rusty was Confused. He suddenly of henry who had become fat and lazy snice his visit to the vet. Was that what bluestar meant by the cutter? "The clan may not be able to offer you such easy food or warmth," continued bluestar."

Chapter 2. Offer

[image] [image]

"In The Season of Leaf-Bare, nights in the forest can be Curel". The clan will Demanded great loyalty in the forest and hard work. You will be expected to protect the clans with your life if necessary. And there are many mouths to feed. But rewards are great. You will remain a tom. You will be trained in the way's of the wild. You will learn what it is to be a real cat. The strength and fellowship of the clan will always be with you,Even when you hunt alone."

Rusty's head reeled bluestar seemed to be offering him the life he had waiting to see. And so tantalisingly, in his dreams, but could he live like for real? Loinheart interrupted his thoughts. "Come bluestar lets not waster any more time here. We must be ready to join the othet patrol at moon high. Tigerclaw will wonder what has become of us. He stood up and his tail expectantly. " wait Rusty Moewed." " can i think about your offer?" Blue star looked at him for long a momment and nodded. "Loinheart will be here tomorrow at sun high." She told him. Give him your answer then." Bluestar murmured a low signal, and in the single movement the three cats turned and disappeared into the forest. Rusty blinked. He stared-excited-uncertain up past the ferns that encircled him. Through the canopy of leaves, to the. Star that glittered in the clear sky. The scent of the clans cats Still hung heavy in the evening air. And as Rusty turned and headed for home. He felt a strange sensation inside him, tugging him back into of the depths of the forest. His fur prickled deliciously in the light wind, and the rustling leaves. Seemed to whisper in his name into the shadows.

Art not mine.

The end

Chapter 3. Im in

[image] [image] [image]

That morning, as He slept Off his night Wandering, the dream came again,even more vivid than before. Free of his collar, agian, he stalked the timid ceature, but this. Time he was aware of being watched. shining from the shadows of the forest he saw dozens of yellow eyes. The clan cats had enter his dream world.
Rusty woke, blinking in the bright sky that was streaming arcoss the the kitchen floor. Hia fur flet heavy and thick with warmth. His food bowl had been topped up, and his water bowl rinsed out and flilled with bitter-tasting twoleg water.Rusty preferred drinking from the puddles outside but when it was hot, or he very thirty's, he had to admit it was easier to lap up the water indoors. could he really abandon this comfortable life?.

He ate, then pushed his way out of the cat flap into the garden was heavy with the smell of early blossoms. "Hello,Rusty!" Mewed a Vocie from the from the fence. It was smudge." You should have been an hour ago. The baby sparrows were out stretching their wings.

Oof srry this is short. U didnt feel like writing that much today.

Rusty and Smudge

[image] [image]

"Did you catch anything?" Rusty asked.
Smudge yawned" Couldn't be bothered. I'd already eaten enough at home today. Anyway why weren't you out earlier?" Yesterday you were complaining about henry sleeping his time away, and today you're not much better yourself." Rusty sat down on the cool earth beside the fence and curled his tail neatly over his front paws. I was in the forest last nights." He reminded his friend." At once felt the blood stir in his veins and his dur stiffen. Smudge looked down at him, his eyes wide. Oh yes I forgot! How was it? Did u catch anything? Ot did They catch you?
He paused, not sure how to his Friend what had happen out there. " i meet some wild cats" he bega. What Smudge astonished Did you get into a fight?"
Sort of." Rusty could feel the energy surging through his body again as he recalled the strength and power of the clan cats were u hurt? What happened? Smudge prompted him eagerly.

There were three of the them bigger and stronger than any of us." And u fought all three of them!" Smudge interrupted, his tail with twitching with exitement. No!" Rusty mewed hastily. Just the youngest one the other two came later." How come they didn't shred you pieces?" They just warned me to leave their territory. But then.. he hesitated for a second what! Mewed smudge impatiently. Rusty sigh they asked me to join the clan."? Smudge whisker quivered disbelievinly. They did! Rusty inisisted why would they do that smudge asked I don't know rusty adimitted. I think they need extras paw in their clan," sound a bit strange to me I wouldn't trust them if i was u smudge mewed rusty took a look a Smudge. His black and white firend he was perfectly happy living with his twoleg. He would never understand the restless longinf that rusty dream stirred in him night after night. Buy do trust and i have made up my mind. Im going to join them" but i might never see u again. My housefolk will get another cat u will be fine you get along with everyone!" But it will never will the same Smudge

wailed. That just the point. If i stay here they will take me the cutter. I won't be the same either smudge.

One last Day

[image] [image]

Smudge looked puzzled. "The cutter?" He echoed "The vet," Rusty Explained. " To be altered, like henry was." Smudge shrugged and stared down in his paws. "But henry's all right," he mumbled."l mean,l know he's a bit lazier now, but he's not unhappy. We could still have fun." Rusty quite sad at the thought of leaving his firend." But he made up his Mind He not gonna Stay in here Fovever." Rusty sigh l'm sorry, smudge. I'll miss you, but i have to go." Smudge didn't reply, but stepped forward and gently."Fair enough. I can see i can't you, but at least let's spend one more morning together."

Rusty found himself enjoying the morning even more than usual spending time with his firend,sharing words with the cats he had grown up with, every one of his senses felt supercharged, as if he was poised before a huge jump. Well visting smudge old haunts with his firend Rusty Saw a Dark firgure,"hey Smudge Do you noticed that?" Over there smudge look at it but Couldn't see it, Smudge was Slightly
Confused at it" Then Turn his head to Rusty, must be Seeing things There nothing There" Smudge Said Rusty, Oh yeah Guess i am" rusty said Quietly but the firgure Were still there. Smudge Had left. Rusty Sigh and left knowing it was sun high and he needed to go. Rusty Jumps over the fance to his home And Jump over his fance Into the forest.

"Now all his thoughts where he had met with the clan cats the night before, he sat down and tasted their air. Tall trees shielded the ground from the midday,making it comfortably cool.

Loin heart and whitestorm

[image]

Here and There a patch of sunlight Beam Through a gap in the leaves lit Up the Forest Floor. Rusty Could smell the same Cat-scent as the last night, But he Had no Idea Whether it was Old or new. He Lifted his Head and sniffed Uncertainly." You have a lot learn," meowed a deeped voice."Even the tiniest clan cat knows when another cat is Nearby". Rusty saw a pair of green eyes glinting from beneath a bramble bush. Now He recognized the scent: it was loinheart."Can you tell if I am Alone?" He asked the golden Tabby,Stepping in into the light.Hasitly,Rusty Sniffed Again.The Scent Of bluestar And GrayPaw were still there, but not as strong as the previous night,he mewed, "Bluestar and graypaw aren't with you this time." "That right," he mewed."But someone else is." Rusty stiffed As a second Clan cat strode into the clearing."This is white Storm" Purred Loinheart. One of Thunderclan's Senior Warriors."

Rusty looked at the Tom and felt his Spine tingle with cold fear. Was this a trap? Long-bodied and muscular, whitestorm stood in font of Rusty and gazed down at him.His white coat was thick and unmarked his eye the yellow of sunbaked sun. Rusty flattened his ears warily,tensed his muscles in preparation for a fight. "Relax, before your fear-scent bring unwanted attention,"growled loinheart. "We are only to take you to our camp"Rusty sat very still, hardly, hardly daring to breathe. As Whitestorm stretched his nose forward And gave him a curious sniff.

DarkForest

[image]

Rusty Woked up in a dark strange Void,He Walked through a dark void that smelled of rotting bones and flesh, Rusty Thought himself "What is this place?" He decided to keep walking, After awhile he saw A forest, he wandered what was in the forest, he decided to go in the forest, Not knowing what The danger lays ahead for him.

He put his paws on the grass and the Forest into a Dark, cold and while fog moving through the forest, Rusty looked Shock at this, but not scared, he strolled into the Unknown, A red Figure Watch him as he Strolled deeper, With a evil grin then disappeared in the dark sky, Rusty turned right and kept on strolling through the Dark forest, He noticed some cats with blood coming out of their neck he looked in horror at them but they didn't notice him so he kept on walking hoping to find an exit or someone, Mapleshade looked at rusty And followed him.

Rusty Walk and his legs was getting tired so he decided to take a break and a find a tree, he step under the tree and lay down, Then when he noticed a tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat going to him, he got up and said "Who are you" Said Rusty, The name Mapleshade, and you are? Ouestioned Mapleshade, "Rusty he Said"

MapleShade Looked At the Bright-Flamed Tom -Cat, And Stared at Him, "So how can i get back?, He Said Curiously "Aren't you already Back? MapleShade Said in a Clam Tone
And in A blink of a eye he was back, Then
Rusty notice a white cat, he was back, "Hello, young one," Said the white cat i've heard a lot about you, Rusty looked at the white cat and dipped his head in greeting.

"Come, We can Speak More once we are in the Camp," Ordered Loinheart, and, Without delaying, Loinheart and Whitestorm Leaped away into the Undergrowth.Rusty jumped to his paws and followed as quickly as he Could.
The Teo warriors made no allowances for Rusty as they sped

through the Woodland, and before slowed as they single leap, but which Rusty had to Scramble over paw by paw. They passed through pointedly Fragrant pine trees, where they had to jump across deep narrow valley churned up by a Twoleg-tree Eater.

From the Safety of his garden fence, Rusty had often heard if roaring and Snarling in the Distance, one gully was too wide to jump, half-filled with slimy, foul-smelling water. The Clan waded through without hesitating. Rusty had never put a paw in the water before, But he was determined not show any signs of weakness, so he straiten his eyes and followed, trying to ignore the uncomfortable wetness that soaked his belly fur. At last Loinheart and Whitestorm Stopped, rusty skidded to a halt behind them while the two warriors onto a rock that layed on the edge of small ravine.

"We are very close to camp now" Meowed Loinheart, Rusty strained to see any signs of life moving leaves, a glimpse of fur among the belows below, but he saw nothing except the same undergrowth that covered the rest of the forest floor.
"Use your nose. You must be able to scent it," hissed Whitestorm haphazardly.

Camp part 1

[image]

Rusty Shut his Eyes Closed and Sniffed, Whitestorm was right. The Scents here was very different from the Where Lived, and their Cat Scent he was used to. The air Smelled Stronger. Speaking of many,many different Cats.

He Nodded and Announced, "i can smell cats." Loinheart and Whitestorm both exchanged amused looks. "There will come a time, when and if you are accepted into the Clan, when you will know each clan member-scent by Name," Loinheart moewed. "Follow me!" He led the way nimbly his way. Through a thick patch of gorse. Rusty followed, and Whitestorm took up the patch of gorse. Rusty followed them, and Whitestorm took up the rear. As his sides scraped against the prickly gorse.Rusty look below and Spotted that the grass beneath his paws was falattened into a broad, Foul smelling track. This must be the main entrance into the camp. He thought.

Beyond the gorse A clearing opened up. The ground at the center was bare, hard earth, shaped by many generations of pawsteps by Young and Old Cats From the Clan. The clearing was Dappled- from the Sunshine above, and the air Felt warm and Still. Rusty looked around and his eye Wided. There were Cats Everywhere and he observed them Sitting Alone Or in Groups, Sharing Food, Or Purring Softly as they Groomed one Another.
" just after sunhigh. When the Day is the Hottest, is a time for sharing Tounges" Loinheart Explained.

Draft from 11 July 2023

Camp part 2

[image]

"Sharing tongues?" Rusty spoke, pawing on the ground."Clan cats always spend time grooming each other and sharing news of the day," Whitestorm spoke to him. "We call it sharing tongues. It is a custom that binds the members of the clan together." Rusty looked at whitestorm, and then he noticed the Clan looking at him. The Clan noticed his forigen scent, Some looked unsure at this kittypet, while others looked curiously at him. Suddenly, shy of meeting any cat's gaze directly, Rusty looked around the clearing. It was edged with tick grass, dotted with treestumps, and a fallen tree. A thick curtain of ferns and gorse shielded the camp from the woods.

"Over there, " meowed lionheart, flicking his tail towards an impenetrable-looking trange of brambles, "is the nursery, where the kits are cared for." Rusty swivelled his ears toward the bushes. He couldn't see through the knots of prickly branches, but he could hear the mewling of several kittens with their mother's from somewhere inside. As he watched, a ginger-she cat wantout the small gap in the front of the den. This must be of the queens, he thought. A tabby queen with distinctive black markings appeared around the bramble bush. The two she-cat exchanged a friendly lick between ears before the tabby slipped inside the nursery, whispering to the squealing kits. "The care of our kits is shared by all of the queens," meowed Lionheart, "All cats serve the Clan.

Loyalty to the Clan is the first law in our warrior code, a lesson you must learn quickly if you wish to stay with us. " " Here comes bluestar, " meowed whitestorm, sniffing the air. Rusty sniffed the air and recognised the scent of the pale blue grey she-cat a moment before she appeared from the shadow of a large boulder that was near them at the head of the clear, "He came", bluestar purrs, addressing the warriors.

Whitestorm replied, "Lionheart was convinced he would not." Lionheart twitches his tail, whitestorm looked at him with a content

looked